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SUBJECT: TURKISH PARLIAMENT PUSHES CONSTITUTIONAL
AMENDMENTS FORWARD

REF: ANKARA 1083 AND PREVIOUS

11. (U) Turkey's parliament approved two constitutional amendment packages on May 10, before adjourning until May 15.

12. (U) By a vote of 429 to 12, MPs approved an amendment to list independent candidates on the main ballot instead of separate slips, as in previous elections. The measure is widely seen as a hurdle for pro-Kurdish Democratic Turkey Party (DTP) candidates, who often run as independents. Their supporters, many of whom are illiterate or not fluent in Turkish, may find it more difficult to identify their candidate's name on the main ballot. President Sezer is expected to approve the amendment. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) shelved a companion amendment to lower the age for parliamentary candidates from 30 to 25 for technical reasons, although PM Erdogan announced the party will run 25-29 year old candidates and let the Supreme Election Board (SEB) determine their eligibility.

13. (U) Deputies adopted a second amendment package to hold direct presidential elections and allow Turkey's president to be elected for two 5-year terms rather than one 7-year term. The proposal is based on France's two-round election system. If no candidate receives more than 50 percent of the votes in the first round, the two top names will compete in a second round. MPs approved the measures by a vote of 370 to 1. President Sezer is likely to veto the changes. If parliament approves the package again, Sezer may submit it to referendum, where it would require approval of more than half of the valid votes cast.

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